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25X1

SUMMARY

FAR EAST

1. Political tension in Thailand continues (page 3).

25X1

NEAR EAST - AFRICA

25X1

5. British Foreign Office studying revision of Anglo-Iraqi military treaty (page 5).

EASTERN EUROPE

25X1

7. Italians in Trieste plan demonstration favoring Territory's return to Italy (page 6).
8. French and British Ambassadors oppose pressuring Yugoslavia on Trieste issue (page 7).

SCANDINAVIA

9. US Minister fears Icelandic political crisis (page 7).

LATIN AMERICA

10. Comment on Cuban coup (page 8).

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25X1A

25X1A

FAR EAST

1. Political tension in Thailand continues:

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Police Director General Phao was primarily responsible for forcing the King of Thailand to sign the new constitution and thereby capitulate to the ruling military clique

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The American Embassy in Bangkok, [redacted] states that although the militarist group is "only one step away" from the ultimate goal of complete power, competition for Phibun's office between Phao and his chief rival, Assistant Army Commander Sarit, would create a serious internal conflict, possibly resulting in violence.

25X1

Comment: The Phao-Sarit rivalry has long been a threat to Thai stability. [redacted] as a result of events in the past few days, the chances of violence between followers of these two leaders before 12 March are "even."

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In the past, compromise agreements on Phibun as Premier have prevented the outbreak of violence between rival political groups.

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5. British Foreign Office studying revision of Anglo-Iraqi military treaty:

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The British Foreign Office is now formulating tentative proposals for a revision of the Anglo-Iraqi Defense Treaty in case the Iraqi Prime Minister should feel compelled by domestic pressure to initiate discussions on the subject. The Foreign Office is considering modifications which would turn the two air bases now operated by the RAF over to the Iraqis who would then invite Britain to use them. Other suggestions are also under study.

Comment: The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, which provides Britain with the use of two air bases in Iraq and any necessary facilities in time of war, expires in 1955. In 1948 the Iraqi government which initialled a revision of this treaty was forced out of office. Since that time the issue has been dormant except for sporadic outbreaks of nationalist agitation, specifically following denunciation by Egypt of its treaty with Britain.

- 5 -

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7. Italians in Trieste plan demonstration favoring Territory's return to Italy:

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Pro-Italian elements in Trieste are planning a demonstration for 20 March to mark the fourth anniversary of the tripartite declaration calling for a return of the entire territory to Italy.

The American Political Adviser comments that this action is obviously designed to commit the United States and Britain to support of the tripartite declaration through the local Allied Military Government's approval of the demonstration.

- 6 -

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Comment:

Premier de Gasperi is undoubtedly giving unofficial support to the proposed demonstration as a means of strengthening popular support for his Western-oriented government in face of the forthcoming Italian elections.

8. French and British Ambassadors oppose pressuring Yugoslavia on Trieste issue:

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According to the American Charge, the French and British Ambassadors in Belgrade are very much opposed to the employment of economic pressure on Yugoslavia in order to bring about a solution of the Trieste issue. They believe that the application of pressure would undermine the current Western policy of buttressing Yugoslav independence by supplying aid with no political conditions.

SCANDINAVIA

9. US Minister fears Icelandic political crisis:

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The American Minister to Iceland reports that party conflicts within the Conservative-Progressive coalition government over the balance of payments situation have become so bitter that "a serious political situation must be anticipated." A withdrawal of the Progressives, particularly on the eve of Admiral McCormick's visit to Iceland next week, would gravely prejudice current US efforts to conclude detailed arrangements for additional defense facilities.

The Minister strongly urges granting Iceland's request for immediate American economic aid.

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Comment: The Progressive Party, which has for some time been seeking an issue on which to withdraw from the Cabinet, violently opposes the imposition of additional import restrictions to meet the balance of payments crisis.

LATIN AMERICA

10. Comment on Cuban coup:

The almost bloodless revolt precipitated by General Fulgencio Batista is still in progress. Batista's success cannot be determined at this time, inasmuch as he controls all communications in Havana. All police and military officials in the Havana area appear to on his side.

Batista, former dictator of Cuba, and a senator since 1948, has been a candidate for the presidency in the coming June elections. He headed the United Action Party, which placed third in the October 1951 party listings with less than 10 percent of the total registered voters. Since that time, his chances for attaining the presidency had diminished considerably, and it may have been his deteriorating position which impelled him to strike this sudden blow.

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